THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • TUESDAY • DECEMBER 17, 2024 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 18 • LATE CITY EDITION

People celebrating the 53rd Victory Day in Dhaka on Monday | AFP

READ SHARE FOLLOW
newindianexpress.com
facebook.com/thenewindianexpress twitter.com/newindianexpress
instagram.com/newindianexpress

BANGLADESH MAY HOLD ELECTION IN LATE 2025 OR EARLY 2026: YUNUS

Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus on Monday said the next general election could take place by the end of 2025 or first half of 2026

DATES WILL DEPEND ON POLITICAL CONSENSUS

Yunus said the timing of the election will depend on political consensus as well as electoral reforms. "If we have to hold the election on the basis of a flawless preparation of the voter list, it may be possible to hold it by the end of 2025... And if we add to this the expected level of reforms in the electoral process, then it may take another six months," he added | P11

VOTER LIST TO BE UPDATED BEFORE POLLS

- Yunus said he would like polls to be held after completing all reforms
- "We have to make sure the names of all those who have become eligible to vote in the last 15 years are included in the voters' list. This is a big task," said Yunus, head of Bangladesh's caretaker government that was installed after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina on August 5

Dec 16

MARKS INDIA'S VICTORY IN 1971 WAR, LIBERATING BANGLADESH FROM PAK

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

PALESTINE POINT

In a show of support for the people of Palestine, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra carries a bag with 'Palestine' written on it | PTI

Sitharaman, Kharge exchange barbs in RS

Cong head rebuts charges of constitutional changes for 'one family'

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday accused the Congress of making major amendments to the Constitution "brazenly to help the family and the dynasty", as she initiated a discussion on the commemoration of 75 years of adoption of the Constitution in the Rajya Sabha.

"Each time the Congress brazenly (amended Constitution), only to help the family. The dynasty kept amending the Constitution, and this is how far they went even if it affects any particular woman who desperately needed the benefit," she alleged while referring to the Shah Bano case.

Rebutting the charges, Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge argued that those amendments were essential, like the first one, which aimed to provide reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, resolve issues related to education and employment, and abolish the Zamindari system.

Quoting from Sardar Patel's letter to Nehru dated July 3, 1950, Kharge pointed to Patel's view that constitutional amendment was the only remedy to stop communal propaganda.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Mallikarjun Kharge | PTI

SACHIN'S 99s

Tendulkar's dismissals at 99 found mention in the Rajya Sabha as Kharge sought to draw Chairman Dhankhar's attention to his speech. When Dhankar said, "I am looking at you 99%," Kharge quipped, "Sachin scored 99 runs 10-12 times but it couldn't become a century."

Kharge sharply criticised the BJP-RSS, accusing them of undermining Constitutional values. He claimed the RSS had opposed the Constitution during the Constituent Assembly debates. "RSS mouthpiece *Organiser* in the edition of November 30, 1949 had written about it," he said.

Taking aim at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kharge accused him of twisting facts regarding Nehru's stance on quota and demanded his apology for misleading the nation.

Earlier, Sitharaman accused Congress of failing to pass the Women's Reservation Bill due to coalition pressures and highlighted the party's historical role in the curtailment of free speech. She cited the arrests of poet Majrooh Sultanpuri and actor Balraj Sahni under Nehru's watch as PM as examples of suppressing dissent.

Sitharaman also criticised the Congress for not installing Babasaheb Ambedkar's photo in the central hall of Parliament for decades and for denying him the Bharat Ratna. She also criticised the socialist economic model adopted by Nehru and continued by Indira Gandhi, claiming it hindered India's economic progress.

Responding to Sitharaman's charges on women's quota, Kharge credited the policies of the Congress for enabling its eventual passage in Parliament and promised swift implementation if the party returned to power. He also asked why Modi had not visited Manipur where ethnic violence is yet to abate.

'7,135 minors sought antenatal care in 3 years'

RISHITA KHANNA @ Bengaluru

IN all, 7,135 girls aged below 18 registered for antenatal care or pregnancy-related care in the past three years as per the state's Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) portal, indicating the prevalence of child marriage in society.

Of them, 956 underwent abortions, 1,278 had caesarean delivery or C-sections, six experienced stillbirths, and four died due to pregnancy-related complications.

These figures barely scratch the surface as many cases go unreported. The system to report these cases has completely collapsed, according to experts.

Health officials, however, maintained that a proper system is in place to report minor pregnancy cases and that some girls turn 19 by the time they give birth. But child rights experts and doctors stated that most girls in these situations are anaemic, undernourished, and unfit to endure the severe physical strain of labour pain. Many are compelled to undergo C-sections, often influenced by doctors, who send them to private hospitals.

Activists stated that there are countless cases, where girls become pregnant for the second time before reaching 18, yet their age is falsely recorded as above 19. During the first pregnancy, they are listed as aged 19, and during the second as 21, while they are still under 18.

CONTINUED ON P5

K'taka RTC staff to strike work from Dec 31

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka State Road Transport Employees' Joint Action Committee has called for an indefinite strike from December 31, demanding that the state government fulfil their demands. The strike is likely to cause inconvenience to lakhs of people, especially on the eve of New Year.

Employees of the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation, Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation, Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation and the North-Western Road Transport Corporation will strike work. Payment of arrears amounting to Rs 1,750 crore pending for 36 months and Rs 306 crore DA for retired employees are among their demands. The committee also demanded that the employees' salary be revised with retrospective effect from January 1, 2024.

Committee office-bearers said Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao received a petition from them on behalf of the state government on December 14 and assured that he would discuss their demands with the government.

EYES OF THE TIGER

D Gukesh receives a rousing welcome on his arrival at the Chennai airport on Monday. Fans almost mobbed the world chess champion | ASHWINPRASATH | PTI

EXPORTS FALL

Record gold imports widen trade deficit

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

IN what could put pressure on the economy, India's trade deficit—the difference between imports and exports—widened to a record $37.8 billion in November, showing a 4.8% drop in exports and a record increase in imports driven by massive gold demand. The average monthly deficit recorded during the April-October 2024 period was $23.5 billion, government data released on Monday showed.

In absolute terms, merchandise exports fell from $33.75 billion in November 2023 to $32.11 billion in November 2024. In contrast, imports during November 2024 grew 27% to $69.95 billion with gold shipments rising 4.3 times to $15 billion.

"Such high levels of gold imports were likely driven by festive and marriage-related demand and are unlikely to sustain in the ensuing months, which would help to cool the upcoming merchandise trade deficit prints," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, ICRA.

Even though services exports came to the rescue of the November trade, the overall trade deficit (merchandise + services) at $19.84 billion in the month was three times that of the previous year. Services sector exports jumped 27% year-on-year to $35.67 billion in November even as imports surged 29% to $19 billion.

In a break from past trends, services exports for the first time in November raced ahead of merchandise exports by $3.56 billion.

According to Ajay Srivastava, founder, Global Trade Research Initiative, higher services growth has been a consistent trend and is now resulting into higher export values. "Between FY19 and FY24, exports grew at a compounded annual growth rate of 5.8%, while services exports surged at CAGR of 10.5%," he said.

DEMAND IN FLUX

Decline in exports is attributed to a slump in global demand while the uptick in imports shows robust domestic demand

IMPACT ON CAD

Adverse trade deficit may widen current account deficit (CAD) to 2.8% of GDP in Q3, against earlier forecast of 2%, said Aditi Nayar of ICRA

9 MAR 1951 - 15 DEC 2024

SPEAKING HANDS FALL SILENT

AMITAVA SANYAL @ New Delhi

WHEN he was born on March 9, 1951, Zakir Hussain was considered an unlucky child. The arrival of the eldest son had coincided with the family's most distressing moment, as his 'Abba', Allarakha Qureishi, had fallen ill with a heart ailment. The family was somewhat reassured when a holy man appeared at the door of their small house in Mahim, Mumbai and insisted that the son would 'save' the father and that he be named Zakir Hussain—a surname to honour Imam Hussain that no one else in the family shared.

As presaged, the more Zakir fell ill over the next four years, the stronger his father became. By the time the son was five, both had recovered well enough to start a rigorous daily routine of practising the Punjab gharana's style on the *tabla*. In time, rather than fading in the glare of his father's stardom, Zakir stood apart with his own intonation, phraseology and temperament.

In his pre-teen years, Zakir soaked up the experience of listening to his Abba's friend Ravi Shankar on the sitar or Western musicians like the pop group ABBA from up close. Over the next few decades, he built a bridge between the older generation of Samta Prasad, Kishen Maharaj and Allarakha that stressed tradition, and younger musicians open to collaborating with other genres. This openness allowed a rare synergy among the original quartet of Shakti — which included John McLaughlin, L Shankar and T H 'Vikku' Vinayakram — a band formed in 1973 that electrified audiences with a unique mix of Eastern and Western music. That, half a century later, Zakir's work with a much-changed line-up of the band would win him three of his five Grammys is testament to the relevance of his musical ideas.

He would change his approach to suit the occasion. Zakir could be puckish while playing the notes of 'Happy birthday' or *raag* Durga on the *tabla* — something that earned him the epithet of 'speaking hands'. But he could be utterly restrained while accompanying, say, Nikhil Banerjee at a concert or Lakshmi Shankar in a studio session. It's this felicity that made him synonymous with his instrument.

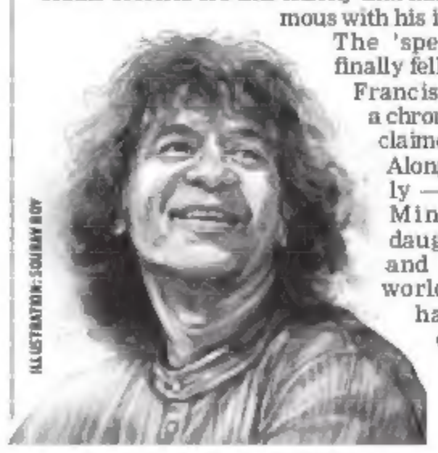
ILLUSTRATION: SOURAV ROY

The 'speaking hands' finally fell silent at a San Francisco hospital as a chronic lung disease claimed him at age 73. Along with his family — wife Antonia Minnecola, and daughters Isabella and Anisa — the world is lucky to have been bequeathed a grand musical legacy by someone born 'unlucky'.

Will not allow Lankan territory to be used against India, says Dissanayake

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

SRI Lanka will not allow its territory to be used against India's national security interests, Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake assured Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. Dissanayake's assurance comes amid concerns in New Delhi over China's attempts to increase its military influence over Colombo.

Dissanayake, who is on a three-day visit to India, held wide-ranging talks with Modi. Both the leaders decided to finalise a bilateral defence cooperation agreement and ramp up their energy ties by establishing electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines.

In the meeting, Modi said he and the Sri Lankan president were in "full agreement" that the security interests of both countries are interconnected. Modi also assured Dissanayake of India's support to the island nation, which is striving to stabilise its wobbly economy.

Dissanayake thanked India's crucial help in managing Lanka's debt restructuring process, and for extending financial assistance of $20.66 million to settle payments due from Lanka for projects completed under existing Lines of Credit, thereby significantly reducing its debt burden.

Lankan prez Anura Kumara Dissanayake with Prime Minister Narendra Modi | PTI

During the meeting, the Sri Lankan president "appreciated India's continued support for the implementation of projects despite the ongoing debt restructuring", the Ministry of External Affairs said.

Underlining the importance of connectivity, Modi said a decision was taken to initiate a ferry service between Rameswaram and Talaimannar. "We have jointly decided that, post the successful launch of the Nagapattinam to Kankesanthurai ferry service, we will also initiate a ferry service between Rameswaram and Talaimannar," he said.

Modi said they deliberated on the fishermen issue and agreed that a "humanitarian approach" should be adopted.

Both leaders also agreed to work together for the timely completion of ongoing projects such as Phase III & IV of Indian Housing Project, 3 (three) Islands Hybrid Renewable Energy Project, and High Impact Community Development Projects across Sri Lanka.

India will train 1,500 Lankan civil servants across ministries over a period of five years. Also on the cards are training programmes in defence and legal matters for Sri Lankans.

(With agency inputs)

Tulsi Gowda

'ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FOREST' PASSES AWAY

Legendary tree planter and Padma Shri awardee Tulsi Gowda passed away at her residence in Honnali village in Uttara Kannada district on Monday. She was 86 | P5

In Karnataka, dairy farmers not paid incentives for nine months

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

THE state government has not paid incentives to dairy farmers for more than nine months. The reason given is "no money".

The government has to pay Rs 5 per litre of milk supplied by farmers under the Ksheeradhaare scheme. Animal Husbandry Minister K Venkatesh admitted that farmers have not been paid their incentives for five months as a proposal in this regard is pending before the Finance Department.

There are 16 milk unions in the state. On an average, they procure one crore litres of milk daily, making Karnataka a top state in dairy farming. The incentive scheme for dairy farmers was launched in 2008 with Rs 2 per litre. In 2013, it was increased to Rs 4 per litre and to Rs 5 per litre in 2016.

Though Congress was in favour of increasing it up to Rs 7, it did not happen. In fact, before the Assembly polls in 2023, the then Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Siddaramaiah stated that if Congress comes to power, it will increase the incentive to Rs 6 per litre.

Venkatesh told the Assembly that from June 2024 to October 2024, farmers have not been paid and the amount payable to them is Rs 606.69 crore. P4